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UNCLAS COLOMBO 000546

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SUBJECT: AMERICAN NGO RECEIVES THREATS AFTER ELECTION  
SURVEY IS PUBLISHED

1. (SBU) Summary - On 03/26/04, RSO Colombo was advised by a local USAID-funded NGO that its office had received a series of anonymous phone and fax threats concerning a local newspaper article that publicized the results of an election survey funded by the NGO that was favorable to President Kumaratunga. The faxed threat stated, "See what happens to your office in a week's time." The telephone threat stated, "Tell your boss to leave the country or his children will be playing with cobras." Two Americans are employed by AED, the USAID-funded NGO. RSO has discussed the threats with the American NGO supervisor and it was agreed to increase the number of private guards at the NGO office and American residence. One of the Americans may relocate his family to a hotel for the weekend, the other American is already in a secure high-rise apartment building. RSO investigation into the threats is pending. End Summary.

2. (SBU) On 03/26/04, at approximately 1500 hours, RSO Colombo received a phone call from Mr. Kim DeRidder, American supervisor of a USAID-funded NGO named AED. DeRidder advised that his NGO office had received a series of disturbing threats during the day apparently in response to a DAILY NEWS article that publicized the results of an election survey funded by the NGO that was favorable to Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga. In summary, the article claimed President Kumaratunga was "best suited" to run the country compared to the current Prime Minister. Emotions have been running high in Sri Lanka since President Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament last month and called for new elections April 2.

3. (SBU) The first threat was phoned in to the NGO at approximately 1030 hours this morning, and was characterized by the NGO as "verbally abusive." A fax that arrived at 1258 hours, however, stated, among other abusive language, "See what happens to your office in a week's time." Then, at 1320 hours, an unidentified man spoke to the AmCit's secretary and stated, "Tell your boss to leave the country or his children will be playing with cobras." That phone call originated from the telephone number 461-5506.

4. (SBU) After discussing the threats with the RSO, Mr. DeRidder agreed it would be a good idea to put a double guard on both the NGO office and his residence. The other AmCit employee, Scott Melendez, is already a resident of a large high-rise apartment building that has 24-hour private security coverage. RSO investigation into the threats is ongoing.

5. (SBU) RSO Comment: National elections are scheduled for April 2, and although incidents of violence are surprisingly lower than expected thus far, Sri Lanka has a history of election violence. An estimated fifty people were killed in the 2001 elections. Local newspapers are notoriously inaccurate and biased in their reporting, and the article in question did in fact make a strong point that the controversial survey was USAID-funded. RSO will investigate the threats to include attempts to trace the phone numbers from which the threats were made, and will maintain a dialog with the NGO on appropriate security recommendations.

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